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SUBJECT: MEDIA WRAP-UP: SUBURBAN UNREST; IRAN'S REACH INTO SHIITE  
MOVEMENTS; IRAQ AND U.S. MID-TERM ELECTIONS. OCTOBER 27, 2006

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Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. (SBU) A number of media outlets commented on recent vandalism and violence in the Paris suburbs in conjunction with the anniversary of last year's suburban unrest and discussed the undercurrents of lingering tensions. Commentators analyzed the situation in the light of a confidential intelligence report leaked to right-of-center Le Figaro, while they portrayed Interior Minister Sarkozy and PM Villepin as vying for the lead role of pacifier. Left-of-center Le Monde looked into Iran's reach into Shiite movements across the globe and right-of-center Le Figaro characterized Iran as "ever more dangerous." Reports on Shiite tension in Iraq and ongoing conjecture about a new Iraq strategy were linked to speculation about the upcoming U.S. mid-term elections. End Summary.

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PARISIAN SUBURBAN UNREST IN PRE-ELECTION CLIMATE  
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¶2. (SBU) Police officials commented on two bus-burning incidents in separate Paris suburbs, referring to the "violence" and "premeditation" of the perpetrators. In a supplement to the left-of-center Le Monde entitled "Suburbs: One Year Later," researcher Claude Jacquier argued that the French system of politics and administration was partly to blame for the deterioration of the situation in urban areas. Right-of-center Le Figaro noted that Interior Minister Sarkozy and PM Villepin were "fighting over the 'banlieues' and working on their visibility in difficult neighborhoods... it is a parade of candidates." Left-wing Liberation claimed that PM Villepin was "playing on the concept of cohesion, while Sarkozy was reinforcing repression." Right-of-center Le Figaro leaked the contents of a "confidential" report by the Renseignements Generaux (in charge of domestic security) which pointed to the existence of "new risks of suburban rioting." FR2 television argued that the "risks were all the more real because political officials had failed to implement effective solutions to last year's problems." A separate FR2 commentator suggested that "the youth appeared to be manipulated by adults and parents" with "an axe to grind" against the government. Popular tabloid Le Parisien quoted a riot police officer (CRS) who was convinced that "bus-burning incidents were a deliberate strategy to force police to intervene in order to trigger a confrontation."

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SHIITES ACROSS THE GLOBE -- IRAN'S REACH  
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13. (SBU) Left-of-center Le Monde focused on the growing hold of Shiites, after having gained "power in Baghdad and in Tehran," and claimed that "America's [Iraq] war had clearly 'liberated' Shiite communities previously held in check by a secular authoritarian regime or Sunni Islamists." The in-depth analysis pondered Iran's "reach" within these communities and pointed to America's "attacks against Iran and its support of the Shiite militia in Iraq." Despite this widespread Shiite presence, Le Monde concluded, through Middle East expert Olivier Roy, that "Tehran does not aim to create a 'Greater Shiitistan.'" Roy is convinced that "Iran is not in a position to rally a Shiite force against the U.S.," not even were there to be a genuine threat of war. In its analysis, left-of-center Le Monde asked whether the Pentagon's strategists, "had already pinpointed Iran as the next target, or whether theirs was mere pre-election gesticulation."

14. (SBU) In right-of-center Le Figaro, senior editorialist Renaud Girard contrasted the time when "American deterrence was at its highest, in February 2003" with today, when "U.S. failure in Iraq had strengthened Iran," and concluded: "With the Iraqi invasion, the U.S. needlessly put itself outside its traditional position of effective deterrence." On October 26, reactions to Iran's renewed nuclear threats led Yves Threard in right-of-center Le Figaro to characterize Iran as "ever more dangerous" and to argue that "while it was imperative to prevent the development of weapons of mass destruction, efforts need to be made to weaken and isolate belligerent regimes from within."

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IRAQ -- A FLEXIBLE NEW POLICY PRECEDES ELECTIONS  
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15. (SBU) FR2 television cited President Bush's October 25 press conference, noting that "the American President was shouldering full responsibility for the situation in Iraq." The commentator affirmed

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that the President was trying to "reverse the negative impact of the war" on the Republicans, in view of the coming mid-term elections. Left-of-center Le Monde claimed that "President Bush was taking full responsibility for the U.S. commitment in Iraq" but was not "announcing any changes to his Iraq policy." Right-of-center Le Figaro argued that the sending of additional troops, "if General Casey were to ask," illustrated the White House's "new rhetoric of tactical flexibility" after having promised to "stay the course." Earlier in the week left-wing Liberation warned that internal Shiite militia rivalry in southern Iraq, "which the British had secured two months earlier," could spread throughout Iraq "if American and British troops were to begin a partial pullout." The commentary concluded that the root causes of Iraqi Shiite rivalry "lay in the American fiasco and the rumors of a possible new strategy." Right-of-center Le Figaro argued that "the Iraqi authorities shared similar concerns about the debate in the U.S. and the UK over a possible withdrawal of troops."

16. (SBU) Senior Editor Nicolas Barre also in right-of-center Le Figaro editorialized that "showing flexibility" was the only way to "deflate" the Democrats' attacks on the Administration's policy of "staying the course" and called the President's "tactical adjustments" his "October surprise" -- a classic maneuver in U.S. domestic policy aimed at swinging just enough votes in favor of the Republicans." Left-of-center Le Monde proclaimed that "the Republican Party, in the throes of self-flagellation, had lost America's trust." In right-of-center La Tribune, Lysiane Baudu argued further that the "the fact that the Iraqi disaster had eclipsed economic concerns in the minds of U.S. voters must be a huge frustration for the Republicans."

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